

Punjab & Haryana



Enter the land of the Sikhs. Gurdwaras replace temples as the most popular places of worship, Blender's Pride replaces Royal Stag as the choice whisky, and the personable, turban-clad population generally provide a break from the stresses found elsewhere in India. Punjab may share a (Sikh) prime minister with the rest of India, but feels distinct from the other states.

Of course, this doesn't mean visitors should expect to escape the idiosyncrasies and inefficiencies that make travel in India such hair-tearing fun. Even in Chandigarh – an Indian city like no other, designed by the modernist architect Le Corbusier and inhabited by the hippest young urbanites north of Mumbai (Bombay) – cows hold up new cars cruising the straight roads.

Indeed many parts of Punjabi culture, from butter chicken to bhangra music, strike visitors as quintessentially Indian. This is because Punjab, with more ex-patriots than any other state, has exported its culture far and wide. Another benefit of this foot-loose population is the foreign remittances that have helped make Punjab the most developed state. This isn't to say there aren't social problems – it's riddled with heroin and opium near the Pakistan border. And amid the modernisation, a strong sense of the past remains at sites such as Amritsar's Golden Temple – Sikhism's holiest shrine and one of India's most beautiful buildings.

Haryana, home of Kurukshetra, split from Punjab in 1966. Along with its Sikh neighbour, the largely Hindu state is called the 'wheat belt' or 'bread basket' for its agricultural prowess.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvel at the peace and splendour of Amritsar's **Golden Temple** (p271), Sikhism's holiest site
- Join the cheering crowds at the bizarre border-closing ceremony at **Attari** (p275)
- Explore Le Corbusier's visionary designs at **Chandigarh** (p261), India's greenest and cleanest city
- Day-trip from Chandigarh to an alternate reality when you venture into the weird and wonderful **Fantasy Rock Garden** (p263)
- Breathe in the intensity of the pilgrimage site **Anandpur Sahib** (p276), where fortified gurdwaras bear testament to centuries of Sikh persecution
- Stop at **Pinjore Gardens** (p267), one of India's finest Mughal walled gardens, en route to Haryana's hill station, the **Morni Hills** (p267)
- Walk from ghat to ghat at the Bhramasarovar, India's largest tank, in **Kurukshetra** (p277)



History

Although Punjab's Sikh heritage (p67) is the most famous aspect of the region's history, architectural excavations have revealed that more than 4000 years ago the area was part of the Indus Valley civilisation established by the Harappans. Buddhist relics have been excavated at sites associated with the later Mauryan dynasty in Sanghol, near Ludhiana (p269), while the Kurukshetra district (p277) contains 360 historical sites within a 92-sq-km radius. The Mahabharata mentions Punjab's land and its people, while Valmiki is believed to have worked on the Ramayana in Sri Ram Tirath Ashram near Amritsar.

While the Indian campaigns of the Persian king Darius and Alexander the Great reached Punjab before faltering, the more successful Mughal invaders regularly surged through the area. Panipat became the battleground where regional domination was won or lost over the next six centuries.

During the 1947 partition of India, Punjab saw horrendous carnage that left hundreds of thousands of people dead (see p50). Later, in 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's highly controversial decision to forcibly remove Sikh

FAST FACTS

Punjab

- Population: 24.3 million
- Area: 50,362 sq km
- Capital: Chandigarh
- Main language: Punjabi
- When to go: October to March

Haryana

- Population: 21.1 million
- Area: 44,212 sq km
- Capital: Chandigarh
- Main language: Hindi
- When to go: October to March

separatists – who were championing for an independent Sikh state (to be called Khalistan) – from Amritsar's holy Golden Temple, ignited bloody Hindu–Sikh clashes. In the same year Gandhi was assassinated at her Delhi residence by two of her Sikh bodyguards (see p52).

FESTIVALS IN PUNJAB & HARYANA

Rural Sports Festival (Feb; Kila Raipur, p269) Three-day festival featuring bullock-cart races, standing on two galloping horses, tent pegging on horseback, kabaddi (see the boxed text, p269), strongman contests, animal races and much more. It runs from Friday to the first Sunday in February, but check as the dates may change.

Surajkund Crafts Mela (1st 2 weeks Feb; Surajkund, p277) Showcasing the best of Haryanan culture alongside offerings from across Southeast Asia, this is a colourful explosion of visiting artisans, hundreds of craft and food stalls, fashion shows, and performances of everything from bhangra (Punjabi dance music) to Sri Lankan drumming.

Basant (mid-Feb; Patiala, p268) Cultural festival with singing, dancing, sports and kite flying.

Holla Mohalla (Mar; Anandpur Sahib, p276) The Khalsa (Sikh warrior brotherhood) was founded in Anandpur Sahib and during this festival thousands of pilgrims gather to sing *kirtan* (hymns), eat free food and watch martial-arts demonstrations and armies of colourful warriors re-enacting past battles.

Baisakhi Festival (13 Apr; statewide) Celebrates the New Year and the first grain harvest. Hard-working Punjabis take a day off, dress up in their finery, give thanks at gurdwaras (Sikh temples), take part in processions and watch sporting contests. Drummers provide the beat for lively bhangra and Gidha folk music that provokes wild dancing.

Shaikh Farid Aagman Purb Festival (Sep; Faridkot, p269) Festival celebrating the life and work of this Sufi saint and poet. Medals are handed out to honest government officials, and the nine-day cultural extravaganza includes all sorts of cultural performances – even a police motorcycle acrobatic team.

Pinjore Heritage Festival (early Oct; Pinjore, p267) A celebration of the Mughal walled gardens, featuring music performances and a Mughal-style bazaar with shops and food stalls.

Harballah Sangeet Sammelan (26–29 Dec; Jalandhar, p269) A music festival starring India's top classical instrumentalists and vocalists.

Gita Jayanti (Dec or Jan; Kurukshetra, p277) Thousands of floating lamps illuminate Bhramasarovar tank. Dramas and cultural events celebrate the anniversary of the Bhagavad Gita.

Information

For information visit www.punjabtourism.org, www.haryana-online.com, www.haryanatourism.com, www.citcochandigarh.com and chandigarh.nic.in.

With more and more local tourists, hotels can fill up, particularly at weekends and during holiday periods.

At the beginning and end of the cooler, drier October-to-March period there is heavy smoke in the air from local farmers burning their fields.

Learn to pronounce *Sat sri akal* (hello in Punjabi) and you'll have rickshaw drivers punching the air with glee.

Getting There & Around

Arriving and leaving by air is increasingly popular – Amritsar has an international airport (p274) and Chandigarh Airport (p266) is working towards that status.

The Grand Trunk Rd through both states is one of India's top highways, but trains or planes are best for long journeys.

CHANDIGARH

☎ 0172 / pop 900,914

In the same way as the modernist architect Le Corbusier's radical design for Chandigarh polarises critics, this anomaly among Indian cities splits visitors. New hotels, department stores, cafés and other air-conditioned hang-outs line the boom town's straight, clean roads, catering to the fast-living young Indians who emulate Westerners and embrace modernity while gleefully disposing their disposable incomes. While some visitors are unimpressed by Chandigarh's nontraditionalism, others find the geometric, green city a welcome break from the chaos of other Indian cities, and plunge into the many sights and, of course, glitzy nightlife.

The capital of both Punjab and Haryana, it is a Union Territory controlled by the central government.

Orientation

The bus station and main shopping area are in Sector 17 while most hotels and restaurants are in neighbouring Sector 22 and Sector 35. The train station is 8km from the city centre, connected by autorickshaw and taxi.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Capital Book Depot (Sector 17)

INTERNET ACCESS

Each of the central sectors has a internet café with the appropriate number in its name.

iWay (Sector 22; per hr Rs 20; ☎ 9.30am-10.30pm)

V-Net Cyber Café (Sector 9; per hr Rs 15; ☎ 10am-8.30pm Mon-Sat)

LEFT LUGGAGE

Bus station (Sector 17; per day Rs 5; ☎ 24hr)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Deep Madison (☎ 270025; Sector 22; ☎ 9am-10pm)

Among the pharmacies opposite the bus station.

PGI Hospital (☎ 2746018; Post Graduate Institute, Sector 12) Has the best reputation.

MONEY

ATMs all over the centre accept foreign cards.

Punjab National Bank (Sector 17; ☎ 10am-2pm Mon-Fri) Also has ATMs all over town.

Thomas Cook (☎ 2745629; Sector 9; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Changes money.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photo shops (Sector 22) Opposite the bus station.

POST

Main post office (Sector 17; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat)

Post office (Sector 17 bus station; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Chandigarh Tourist Centre (☎ 2703839; 1st fl, Sector 17 bus station; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm)

Haryana Tourism (☎ 2702955; Sector 17; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Himachal Tourism (☎ 2708569; 1st fl, Sector 17 bus station; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, closed 2nd Sat of month)

Uttar Pradesh Tourism & Uttarakhand Tourism (☎ 2707649; 2nd fl, Sector 17 bus station; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, closed 2nd Sat of month)

Sights & Activities

CAPITAL COMPLEX

The massive concrete **High Court**, **Secretariat** and **Vidhan Sabha** (Legislative Assembly), all in Sector 1 and shared by Punjab and Haryana, were designed by Le Corbusier.

The High Court, which opened in 1955, is a must-see and can be freely visited – check out the extraordinary architecture from inside and outside. The internal ramp, the wavy overhanging roof and the colourful supporting slabs are the main features. Every courtroom

CHANDIGARH



A **B** **C** **D**

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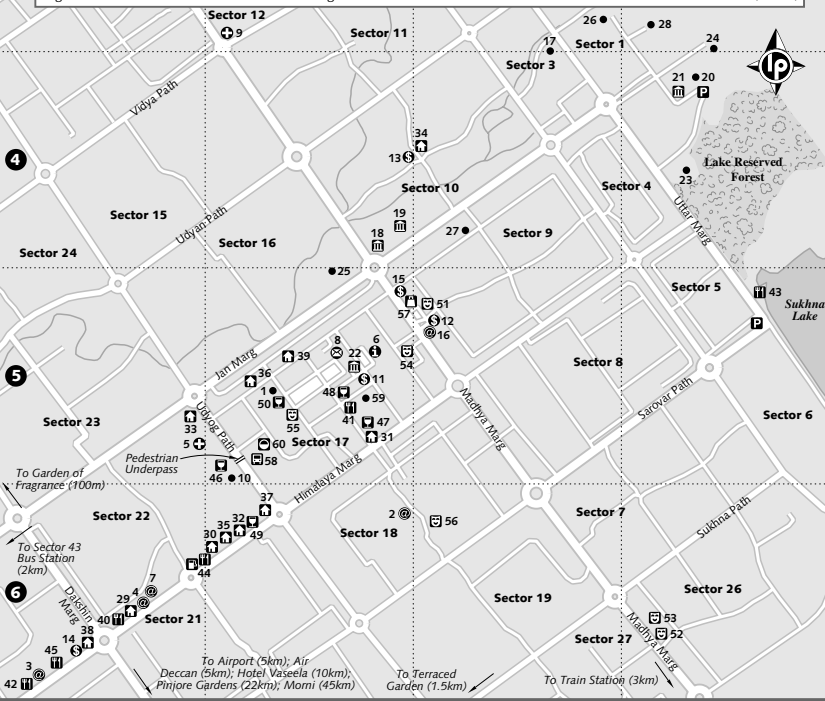
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PUNJAB & HARYANA

contains an abstract woollen tapestry designed by Le Corbusier, viewable when court is not in session (9.30am to 10am, 1pm to 2pm and 4pm to 5pm). You can also walk round to the famous **Open Hand** sculpture, another creation of the workaholic Le Corbusier.

You must enter the High Court via the carpark. On the way is a small **museum** (admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) containing curios such as original Le Corbusier sketches and the handcuffs worn by Ram Godse, who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi (see the boxed text, p51).

To visit the huge Secretariat and the silo-like Vidhan Sabha, obtain a permit from the Architecture Department in the **UT Secretariat** (☎ 2741620; Sector 9).

NEK CHAND FANTASY ROCK GARDEN

Entering this 20-hectare **garden** (adult/child Rs 10/5; ☎ 9am-6pm Nov-Mar, to 7pm Apr-Oct) is like falling down a rabbit-hole into the labyrinthine interior of one man's mind. Created by Nek Chand (see the boxed text, p264) using recycled junk and organic materials, the garden is a maze of twisting walkways and staircases suddenly emerging into val-

leys with crashing waterfalls or amphitheatres overrun by figures made of china shards. No material is wasted, from electrical sockets to colourful wire and glass, in the legions of men, animals, archways and walls with faces around every corner.

SUKHNA LAKE

Another aspect of Le Corbusier's master plan is this attractive artificial lake with **paddle boats** (2-seaters per 30min Rs 30, 4-seaters per 30min Rs 60). Ornamental gardens, a playground and the **Mermaid Fast Food Restaurant & Bar** (meals Rs 50-100) complete the fun.

MUSEUMS

The brilliant **City Museum** (Sector 10; admission free; ☎ 9.45am-5pm Tue-Sun, closed holidays) uses photos, letters, models, newspaper reports and architectural drawings to give a fascinating insight into the planning and development of Chandigarh.

Next door to City Museum, the **Natural History Museum** (admission/camera Rs 2/5; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) is less interesting for its fossilised animal skulls than its manuscript section, containing Sanskrit texts dating back 500 years.

INDIA'S MODERNIST METROPOLIS

Chandigarh was built as the new capital of Punjab following Partition (p50) and, in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru (independent India's first prime minister), as 'an expression of the nation's faith in the future'.

It was always going to be radically modern, but it could have turned out very differently. Two pioneering American architects were originally assigned the task: Matthew Nowicki and Albert Mayer, the latter influenced by the 'romantic picturesque' seen in England's Garden Cities movement. 'This dream of some modern planners depends entirely on...a way of life alien to that of India', said Nowicki, prophesying the experience of anyone who's tried to negotiate a roundabout in Chandigarh.

When Nowicki died in a plane crash, Mayer resigned and Le Corbusier was recruited to finish the job. The Swiss architect envisaged a modernist utopia where 'arithmetic, texturique and geometrics' would replace the 'oxen, cows and goats driven by peasants, crossing the sun-scorched fields'. However, Chandigarh was meant to be a city of people – more democratic than Delhi – and this called for pedestrian piazzas, tree-lined avenues, houses facing traffic-quiet roads, public gardens, and the artificial Sukhna Lake.

Le Corbusier's plan was for low-density, low-rise housing divided into 1-sq-km neighbourhood sectors, each with their own shops, schools and places of worship. Even looking at a map of Chandigarh's numbered sectors, arranged in a geometric grid, provides a sharp contrast with the chaos typically found in urban India.

There was of course room for the odd artistic flourish – notably the symbolic sculptures (no human statues were allowed), and the 'temples of democracy' at the Capital Complex.

Nehru was pleased with the controversial city. 'It is the biggest example in India of experimental architecture. It hits you on the head, and makes you think. You may squirm at the impact but it has made you think and imbibe new ideas.'

GALLERIES

Set in a garden dotted with sculptures such as a mini Eiffel Tower, the **Government Museum & Art Gallery** (Sector 10; admission Rs 2, camera Rs 5; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun, free guided tours 11am & 3pm, films 11am & 3pm Sun) has a sizeable collection including embroidered *phulkari* (embroidery work) wraps made by Punjabi village women, modern art and Buddhist sculptures from across Asia.

Under renovation at the time of research, the **National Gallery of Portraits** (Sector 17; admission free; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1.30pm Sat, closed last Sat of month & holidays), behind the State Library, displays photos and paintings illustrating various facets of the Independence movement.

DOMESTIC DWELLINGS

Another aspect of Le Corbusier's grand plan is the lines of **three-storey terrace housing** in Sector 22 and Sector 17. Despite the overall similar-

ity of design, each unit has different doors, windows, balconies, brickwork and layout, painted in various pastel shades.

PARKS & GARDENS

In line with Le Corbusier's vision of a garden city, Chandigarh is dotted with parks. The **Rose Garden** (Sector 16) and **Bougainvillea Garden** (Sector 3) are perfect for a cycle or stroll. Less central parks include the **Terraced Garden** (Sector 33) and the **Garden of Fragrance** (Sector 36).

Tours

An open-top, double-decker **tourist bus** (1 trip/full tour/half-day/full day Rs 10/25/50/75; ☎ hourly 9.30am-6.30pm) runs from Hotel Shivalikview to the Rose Garden, Punjab University, Government Museum & Art Gallery, Capital Complex, Fantasy Rock Garden and Sukhna Lake. It takes an hour and you can hop on and off.

JUNK ART GENIUS

Following Independence and Partition, as refugees flooded across the Pakistan border and a newly liberated India made the bold statement that was Chandigarh, one of the new city's road inspectors was a diminutive arrival from Pakistan called Nek Chand. Struck by the amount of waste generated as villages were cleared in the construction of Chandigarh, Chand hauled this matter back to his jungle home and gave it a second life as a sculptural material.

Eventually he had tens of thousands of forms made of urban and industrial waste as well as local stone, created by his own hand and the slow forces of nature. His battalions of water women, pipers, chai-drinkers, monkeys, cheeky stick men wearing tea-cup hats, dancing women and other characters steadily multiplied in secretly sculpted spaces.

Incredibly, Chand's efforts weren't officially discovered until some 15 years after they began, when a government survey crew stumbled upon them in 1973. The unauthorized garden was illegally occupying government land and should technically have been demolished, but the local council recognised the garden as a cultural asset. Chand was given 50 labourers and paid a salary so he could devote himself to the project.

Today, the garden is said to receive an average 5000 visitors a day. It is one of Asia's most significant recycling programs. There is a **Nek Chand Foundation** (www.nekchand.com), raising funds and recruiting volunteers to restore broken mosaic panels, remove graffiti, photograph and document. There have been exhibitions about the garden in America and Europe and even minireplica gardens built.

Now in his 80s, Chand is still hard at work in his pebble-lined office hidden in the garden. He helpfully proffers exhibition catalogues, newspaper cuttings and correspondence, but he is a man of few words. There is the obvious language barrier of course, but also, perhaps, the humble nature of a man who has spent decades quietly beaver away at his rock-and-junk world.

Indeed, he is less vocal about having met pretty much every notable Gandhi than he is about his plans to develop the garden so visitors will not have to retrace their steps. Asked whether it's true that the garden is India's most visited tourist attraction after the Taj Mahal, he replies, 'It is said.'

Chand had no formal education beyond high school. 'I had no training, no previous interest - one day I just started,' he says. 'In my childhood I used to build mud houses and other toys.' He is said to be influenced by modernist masters such as Le Corbusier and Gaudi, but the deeply spiritual member of Punjab's Hindu community is clear on the main source of his ideas: 'They are a gift from god.'

Sleeping

BUDGET

Budget accommodation is in short supply so book ahead.

Hotel Satyadeep (☎ 2703103; Sector 22; s Rs 400-600, d Rs 470-750; 🏠 📺) The best budget option, run by friendly followers of the South Indian guru Sai Baba. Upstairs from the affiliated Sai Sweets, the great-value hotel has quiet rooms with balconies and all facilities.

Hotel Divyadeep (☎ 2705191; Sector 22; s Rs 450-700, d Rs 550-800) Satyadeep's roomier, smarter sister hotel.

Chandigarh Hotel (☎ 2703690; Sector 22; r with/without AC Rs 900/700) The rooms with balconies are lighter and preferable in this cavernous fall-back option with TVs in the 15 rooms.

Hotel Akash Deep (☎ 5074086; Sector 22; s Rs 895-1095, d Rs 1095-1295; 🏠) Ask for a 20% discount in this modern and clean hotel with a dash of Continental style.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel Kwalita Regency (☎ /fax 2720204; Sector 22; s Rs 1295-1995, d Rs 1495-2195; 🏠) Each of the 14 rooms is different in this understated designer hotel, with rugs on the varnished wood and marble floors, modern art in the corridors and an open-plan bar-restaurant in the foyer.

Hotel Sunbeam (☎ 2708100; www.hotelsunbeam.com; Sector 22; s Rs 1395-1595, d Rs 1695-1895) With blankets on the beds and Life's Good TV sets, the quiet rooms have an institutional air in this unexciting but good-value hotel. The plush Ambassador cocktail lounge and restaurant is popular among the mobile-phone set.

Hotel City Heart (☎ 2724203; cityheartchd@yahoo.com; Sector 17; s/d/ste Rs 1395/1595/2295; 🏠) This 33-room hotel set around a marble spiral staircase offers a rooftop restaurant, a travel desk, a doctor on call, and kitschy toy tigers and rabbits in cabinets. The stylish rooms have cable TV and fridges.

Kaptain's Retreat (☎ 25005599; Sector 35; s/d from Rs 2190/2490; 🏠) This plush hotel is packed with signed cricket bats, whites and photos belonging to the owner, cricketing legend Kapil Dev. For unenthusiastic pace-bowlers, there is an excellent bar-restaurant as well as beautiful decorative touches such as wooden ceiling fans.

Hotel Shivalikview (☎ 2700001; shivalikview@citcochandigarh.com; Sector 17; s/d/ste with breakfast & dinner from Rs 2600/3000/5500; 🏠 📺) This government

hotel has a shopping arcade, money changing, two restaurants, a café and comfortable, spacious rooms.

our pick Hotel Vaseela (☎ 287575; www.vaseela.punjab.com; Nadiali; s Rs 2999-3499, d Rs 3499-3799; 🏠) This 'ethnic countryside resort' offers a taste of traditional Punjabi culture in luxurious surroundings. Ranged around a swimming pool are a gallery and shop displaying local craftwork, a health club, a swish bar and an exotic restaurant. Accommodation is in modern cottages built in traditional Punjabi style, or the lavish main complex. Located near the airport, the resort provides free pick-ups from the city centre.

Hotel Mountview (☎ 2740544; www.citcochandigarh.com; Sector 10; s/d/ste with breakfast Rs 3750/4450/6400; 🏠 📺 📺) Once Chandigarh's top hotel, with two restaurants, 24-hour café, bar, money changing and wi-fi internet centre. Although not as grand as the foyer suggests, the rooms have baths, minibridges and safes. The swimming pool, beauty parlour and health club are open to nonguests.

Taj Chandigarh (☎ 5513000; www.tajhotels.com; Sector 17; s/d/ste from Rs 6000/10,000/18,000; 🏠) This five-star, 149-room monolith has all the facilities you would expect of the Taj chain, down to the business desks, wi-fi capability, minibars and plasma-screen TVs in the rooms. Before dining in the Indian or Chinese restaurant, kick back among the lava lamps and jazzy beats in the bar.

Eating

Chandigarh boasts many modern places to eat, offering everything from Punjabi to Western food.

our pick Sai Sweets (Sector 22; per plate Rs 10-30) A good choice for breakfast, this Sector 22 institution has an enticing array of sweets and *namkin* (spicy nibbles). Try the sweet-and-salty lentil *togla*, the fluffy yoghurt-and-lentil *dehi halwa*, the poppy-seed-and-sweetened-cheese *kheerkadam* and, on Tuesday, the sweet-popcornlike lentil *boondi*.

Nagpal Pure Vegetarian Dhaba (Sector 22; meals Rs 50-80) Canteenlike but clean and never short of customers, it serves hearty helpings of *pan-eeer* (unfermented cheese) and the like.

Bhoj Vegetarian Restaurant (Sector 22; thali Rs 90) Specialising in Punjabi and Himachal dishes, particularly thalis, this dependable eatery offers a different lunch and dinner menu every day.

Khyber (☎ 2607728; Sector 35; meals Rs 150) Stylish curry house that's full every night of the week. The cowboy-themed bar in the basement shows satellite sports coverage.

Ghazal (Sector 17; meals Rs 120-170; ☎ 11.30am-7.30pm) This grandly appointed restaurant offers draught beer and expensive Indian, Continental and Chinese dishes.

Shangri-La Plus (☎ 2608082; Sector 35; meals Rs 150) A Chinese restaurant with high prices and slow service but generous servings when they arrive. Try the *yaki gyoza* – dumplings with hot garlic sauce.

Nukka Dhaba (Sector 22; meals Rs 20-60) and **Chawla's Chicken** (Sector 22; meals Rs 65-160; ☎ 11.30am-4pm & 6pm-midnight) are OK for a bite at lunchtime.

Drinking

Beans (Sector 9; snacks Rs 20; ☎) This cool café has leather sofas, hip-hop and R&B on the stereo, and Irish coffee and sundaes on the menu.

City Heart 2 (Sector 22; beers from Rs 30) This ribald drinking den is an antidote to Chandigarh's glitz, but the food will only seem tasty or like good value if it's serving a soaking-up purpose.

English Garden Bar (Sector 17; meals Rs 150, beers from Rs 35) A basement bar dominated by a big screen, it doesn't exactly bring an English garden to mind, but is OK for a draught beer at weekends. Mehfil restaurant upstairs is less classy than nearby Ghazal, but it's more amicable and its cheaper menu is just as extensive.

Down Under (Sector 17) A gay bar in the basement of Hot Millions 2 with a pool table, loud house music and Thunderbolt on tap.

Piccadilly's Blue Ice Bar & Restaurant (Sector 17; meals Rs 110, beers from Rs 65) Popular among both travellers and local scenesters, this split-level bar-restaurant has chrome chairs, light-boxes, curvy décor, and Hindi pop videos accompanied by Western rock.

The bars at restaurant Khyber (see above) and hotels such as Taj Chandigarh and Hotel Sunbeam (see p265) are also good hang-outs.

English Wine & Beers Shops are as common in Chandigarh as modernist façades. The outlets in Sector 22 have drinking dens round the back.

Entertainment

Antidote (Sector 26; admission Rs 1000; meals Rs 135-225) The hippest of a cluster of nightclubs, with lasers scanning above the white sofas and bar-

men proffering lighters as smoothly as they palm Rs 1000 notes.

Aerizzona (Sector 9; admission per couple incl 2 beers Rs 350; ☎ Wed & Fri-Sun) A cheap and cheerful club that's fun on Sunday night – 'foreigners' night' – when it attracts Chandigarh's African students.

OP Sharma & His Colourful Indrajal (Sector 17; admission from Rs 100; ☎ 3pm & 7pm) The three-hour show by 'the world's greatest and fastest magician', with an intermission after 1½ hours, features dogs, rabbits and midgets.

If you can't get past the door at Antidote, try **Cross Over** (Sector 26; admission Rs 600; ☎ 9pm-2am) and **Rendevous** (Sector 26).

Tagore Theatre (Sector 18) hosts music and dance shows by performers such as touring Bollywood stars. **Kiran Cinema** (Sector 17) and **Neelam Cinema** (Sector 17) screen Bollywood blockbusters and sometimes movies in English.

Shopping

The central section of Sector 17 is the main shopping and entertainment area.

Ebony (Sector 9) One of a number of department stores stocked with brand-name goods.

Music World (Sector 17 & Sector 18) The best selection of CDs and you can listen for free.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air Deccan (☎ 080-39008888; airport) Daily budget flights to Delhi (4.35pm) and Jammu (1.35pm).

Indian Airlines (☎ 2262517; Sector 17; ☎ 10am-1.15pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) Offers daily flights to Delhi (US\$105, 3.15pm) and Mumbai (US\$290, 3.15pm).

Jet Airways (☎ 2741465; Sector 9; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Daily flights to Delhi (US\$100, 2.25pm).

BUS

Half a dozen companies operate buses, so it can be confusing, especially as most long-distance buses leave from the new Inter State Bus Station (ISBT) station in Sector 43. Prepaid autorickshaws to the new station from the Sector 17 terminal cost Rs 50.

Regular buses run to Patiala (Rs 45, three hours), Sirhind (Rs 45, two hours), Anandpur Sahib (Rs 45, 2½ hours), Amritsar (Rs 110, seven hours), Dharamsala (ordinary/deluxe Rs 153/200, eight hours), Manali (ordinary/deluxe Rs 215/290, 11 hours), and Haridwar (Rs 120, six hours) in Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal).

Buses to Delhi (ordinary/deluxe Rs 128/248, 5½ hours) and Shimla (ordinary/semideluxe/

deluxe Rs 89/130/180, four hours) leave from the Sector 17 stand.

Travel agencies such as **Raja Travels** (☎ 270 0119; Sector 22; 🕒 9am-9pm) sell tickets for AC deluxe private buses to destinations including Delhi airport (Rs 850, seven hours, five daily), Amritsar (Rs 250, four hours, three daily) and Ludhiana (Rs 180, two hours, five daily).

TRAIN

A **reservation office** (☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) is on the 1st floor of the bus stand. Prepaid autorickshaws from there to the train station cost Rs 50.

Two fast trains connect Delhi and Chandigarh: the daily *Shatabdi Express* (chair car/1AC Rs 655/955, three hours) and the *Jan Shatabdi Express* (Rs 107/495, four hours), which runs daily except Sunday.

Half a dozen trains go to Kalka (Rs 38/350, one hour), from where four daily trains (Rs 51/317, five hours) rattle up the mountain to Shimla.

Getting Around

Chandigarh is spread out but, with its cycle paths and parks, was built for cycling. Chandigarh Tourist Centre hires out bicycles (per eight hours Rs 100).

Cycle-rickshaw rates vary from Rs 10 to Rs 30. Fares from the prepaid autorickshaw booth behind the bus station include Rs 30 to Sukha Lake or the government buildings, and Rs 85 to the airport.

Taxis charge around Rs 150 to the airport, Rs 125 for an hour's tour or Rs 550 for eight hours (limited distance).

Avtar Travels (☎ 2700001; www.avtartravels.com; Sector 17) at Hotel Shivalikview hires out AC cars from Rs 850 per 80km.

AROUND CHANDIGARH

Pinjore (Yadavindra) Gardens

These reconstructed 17th-century Mughal walled **gardens** (admission Rs 10; 🕒 7am-10pm) are built on seven levels with water features that sometimes operate and panoramic views of the Shivalik hills.

Founded and designed by Nawab Fidai Khan, who also designed Badshahi Mosque in Lahore (in present-day Pakistan), the gardens served as a retreat for the Mughal kings and their harems. They fled the area during a goitre outbreak and the gardens fell to the Maharaja of Sirmour, Himachal Pradesh.

There is an annual **heritage festival** (see the boxed text, p260) here.

The Mughal-style **Budgerigal Motel** (☎ 01733-231877; dm Rs 150, r Rs 500-2500; 🕒) has spick-and-span rooms with balconies and two four-bed dorms. There's free entry to the gardens through the hotel's popular bar-restaurant.

Jal Mahal (meals Rs 35-200) is a café and bar in the middle of one the gardens' green ponds.

From Chandigarh, take the bus (Rs 15, one hour, frequent) or a taxi (Rs 200).

Morni Hills

Haryana's only hill station gazes across the hazy plains to the Shivalik and Kasauli hills in nearby Himachal Pradesh, providing a taste of the mountainous landscape over the state line.

Located 10km from Morni village, **Hosh & Josh Hills 'n' Thrills** (☎ 01733-250166; Tikka Tal; adult/child Rs 50/30; 🕒 9am-7pm) amusement park is announced by a towering statue of a local mushroom that resembles a nose.

Mountain Quail (☎ 01733-250166; r Rs 800-1100; 🕒) is a basic place with dated rooms and new additions on the way. Ask about trekking opportunities and visits to farms and other local attractions.

Lake View Camping Complex (☎ 01733-250166; Tikka Tal; dm Rs 150, camping Rs 600) has a lakeside site with basic amenities, a terrace restaurant, and rooms under construction at the time of research. Book ahead for rock-climbing and water-based fun.

To get to Morni, take a bus (Rs 40, two hours) or a taxi (Rs 500). Mountain Quail is 2km before the village, from where there is transport to Tikka Taal.

PUNJAB

SIRHIND

☎ 01763 / pop 53,800

This small town has three main attractions, chief among them the **Aam Khas Bagh**, a Mughal walled garden laid out by Emperor Akbar with additions by Emperor Jehangir in the 17th century. Its fountains and wells are empty but make an impressive sight, along with the ruined Jehangir's palace and the winter rooms with vents in the floor. There is a small museum with an interesting exhibition about Punjab's role in Indian Independence.

A 20-minute walk away is an important Sikh pilgrimage site, the golden-domed **Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib**, which commemorates the 1704 martyrdom of the two youngest sons of the 10th Sikh guru, Gobind Singh. Buried alive by the Mughals for refusing to convert to Islam, they are honoured at the three-day **Shaheedi Jor Mela** festival held here every December.

A 10-minute walk further on is **Rauza Sharif**, the decorative marble mausoleum of Muslim saint Shaikh Faruqi Sirhindi. It is regarded as a second Mecca by India's Sunnis, who flock here every July/August during the **Urs festival**.

The **Maulsari Tourist Complex** (☎ 222250; off Bassi Rd; r with/without AC Rs 700/500; ♿), near the Aam Khas Bagh, 3km north of the Grand Trunk Rd, has drab but spacious rooms, a garden setting, and a good bar-restaurant.

Regular buses connect Sirhind with Patiala (Rs 17, one hour) and Chandigarh (Rs 45, two hours).

PATIALA

☎ 0175 / pop 238,000

Once the capital of an independent Sikh state that was established by Baba Ala Singh as the Mughals weakened (see p45), Patiala is today a friendly town with a handful of sights. It's famous for *pagri* (turbans), *paranda* (hair-braiding tags), *jootis* (Punjabi slippers, often pointy-toed), the **Basant festival** (see the boxed text, p260) and, of course, the Patiala peg (see the boxed text, below).

Bindra's Communication Centre (9-10 MC Market; per hr Rs 25; ☎ 7.30am-10pm) is an internet café near the State Bank of Punjab.

State Bank of Punjab (the Mall; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) changes money and has a Visa and MasterCard ATM.

Built in a Mughal/Rajasthani style, the faded **Qila Mubarak** fort looks like it could have been transported from the Great Thar Desert to its position in the bazaar area. Its ceiling is so unsound that entry is not allowed, but a wander round its crumbling walls and spiky doors is worthwhile, and there's an **arms gallery** (admission Rs 10; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) in the 1859 Durbar Hall. Antique weapons, once used by Sikh warriors, are displayed beneath 22 chandeliers.

New Moti Bagh Palace (admission Rs 10; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a wedding-cake building with a suspension bridge over a huge, empty tank. Inside, the Art & Medal Gallery contains Krishna statues, ivory figurines, stuffed animals, furniture, sitars and tablas. Also called Sheesh Mahal, the palace is a 20-minute autorickshaw ride from the bus stand and train station.

Nearby, the grand Old Moti Bagh Palace houses the National Institute of Sports and a **sports museum** (admission free but ID required; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri). The exhibits include memorabilia relating to Punjabi sprinting hero Milkha Singh, 'the Flying Sikh'.

Ten minutes away by autorickshaw, the small **zoo** (admission Rs 5; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), also known as the deer park, houses crocodiles, jackals, monkeys, emus and porcupines.

Sleeping & Eating

Green's (☎ 2213071; Mall; r Rs 275-660; ♿) This shadowy place has a ghostly colonial feel, with wood wall panels, mottled mirrors and a well-stocked bar. Rooms have TVs and reasonable bathrooms as you move up the price range.

Gopal's (Leela Bhawan; meals Rs 25-65; ☎ 10am-10pm) Self-service vegetarian fare: pizzas, burgers, noodles, *namkin*, milkshakes and ice cream.

Regency (☎ 2212846; the Mall; meals Rs 75-140) The restaurant at Narain Continental, the best

A PATIALA PEG

In the early 1900s a tent-pegging contest took place in Patiala between the teams of the viceroy and the sports-mad maharaja of Patiala. Tent-pegging is the curious sport of spearing tent pegs into the ground with a lance from the back of a galloping horse.

Desperate to win and fearful of the wrath of their maharaja, the Patialan team invited their opponents to drink the night before the match. The British were plied with larger-than-usual measures (or pegs) of whisky, while the tent pegs were changed – smaller ones for the viceroy's team and larger ones for the Patialans. The maharaja's team won but the viceroy's team complained to the maharaja about the size of the pegs. The maharaja (not realising that the complaint referred to the tent pegs) replied that in Patiala, well known for its hospitality, the pegs (of whisky) were always larger than elsewhere. Even today an extra-large measure of whisky is known all over India as a Patiala peg.

KABADDI – KABADDI – KABADDI

A cross between 'touch' and a game of rugby without a ball, kabaddi is played all over India but is particularly popular in Punjab. While one of the players chants 'kabaddi' – and he can't stop or the other team of seven wins – the opposition has to get him to touch the centre line. The game frequently descends into a scrum, but one young player assured us there were rules: 'You're not supposed to punch him or put your hand over his mouth – that would be a foul.'

A less common, nine-a-side variation on this is *kho-kho*, in which a player chases his opponent around a line of eight sitting players.

hotel in town, is pricey but popular, offering the usual range of curries.

Regular buses connect Patiala and Sirhind (Rs 17, one hour).

NORTHERN PUNJAB

India's textile centre, **Ludhiana**, the site of a battle in the First Sikh War of 1845–46, is also the headquarters of Hero Bicycles, which produces nearly three million bikes annually.

Ludhiana is a good base from which to attend the **Rural Sports Festival** (see the boxed text, p260) in Kila Raipur in February, and to visit **Kapurthala**. This was the home of the Spanish flamenco dancer who married a local maharaja, a story that inspired the Javier Moro novel which Hollywood actress Penelope Cruz was hoping to turn into her directorial debut, *The Princess of Kapurthala*, at the time of writing. With a permit from the District Commissioner's office you can visit the maharaja's pink, Versailleslike **Jagatjit Palace**.

Jalandhar survived sacking by Mahmud of Ghazni nearly 1000 years ago and later became an important Mughal city. Nowadays it's a commercial centre and the venue for a top **music festival** (see the boxed text, p260).

Faridkot, near the Pakistan border, was once capital of a Sikh state of the same name and has a 700-year-old fort. The 13th-century poet and Sufi (Muslim mystic) Shaikh Farid lived here, and is honoured by a **festival** (see the boxed text, p260). His belief in equality – 'Every person's heart is a jewel' – influenced Guru Nanak (see the boxed text, p273) and some of his poems are in Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib.

AMRITSAR

☎ 0183 / pop 1.01 million

Founded in 1577 by the fourth guru Ram Das, Amritsar is home to Sikhism's holiest shrine the Golden Temple. The gold-plated gurdwara glitters in the middle of its holy pool like a huge bullion bar, a sight that some visitors rate alongside the Taj Mahal – particularly after experiencing the surrounding old city's frenetic lanes. In contrast to the old city, the internet cafés, hotels and eateries in Amritsar's modern areas are as slick as the state capital.

The original site for the city was granted by the Mughal emperor Akbar, but another Mughal, Ahmad Shah Durani, sacked Amritsar in 1761 and destroyed the temple. It was rebuilt in 1764, and in 1802 was roofed with gilded copper plates by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and become known as the Golden Temple.

During unrest in Punjab in the early 1980s, the Golden Temple was occupied by separatists intent on creating an independent Sikh homeland. On the orders of then-prime minister Indira Gandhi, they were finally evicted by the army in 1984 in a controversial military action that damaged to the temple and fuelled violent Sikh-Hindu clashes in Punjab and beyond that left thousands (predominantly Sikhs) dead. Gandhi was later assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards (see p52).

Orientation

The old city, including the Golden Temple and bazaars, is southeast of the train station and surrounded by a circular road, once the site of the city's massive walls. Modern Amritsar, north of the train station, contains most of the upmarket hotels and Lawrence Rd, which is a popular eating and shopping street. The bus station is 2km east of the train station.

Information**INTERNET ACCESS**

Cyber Swing (per hr Rs 40; ☎ 9.30am-midnight)

Upstairs from Punjabi Rasoi.

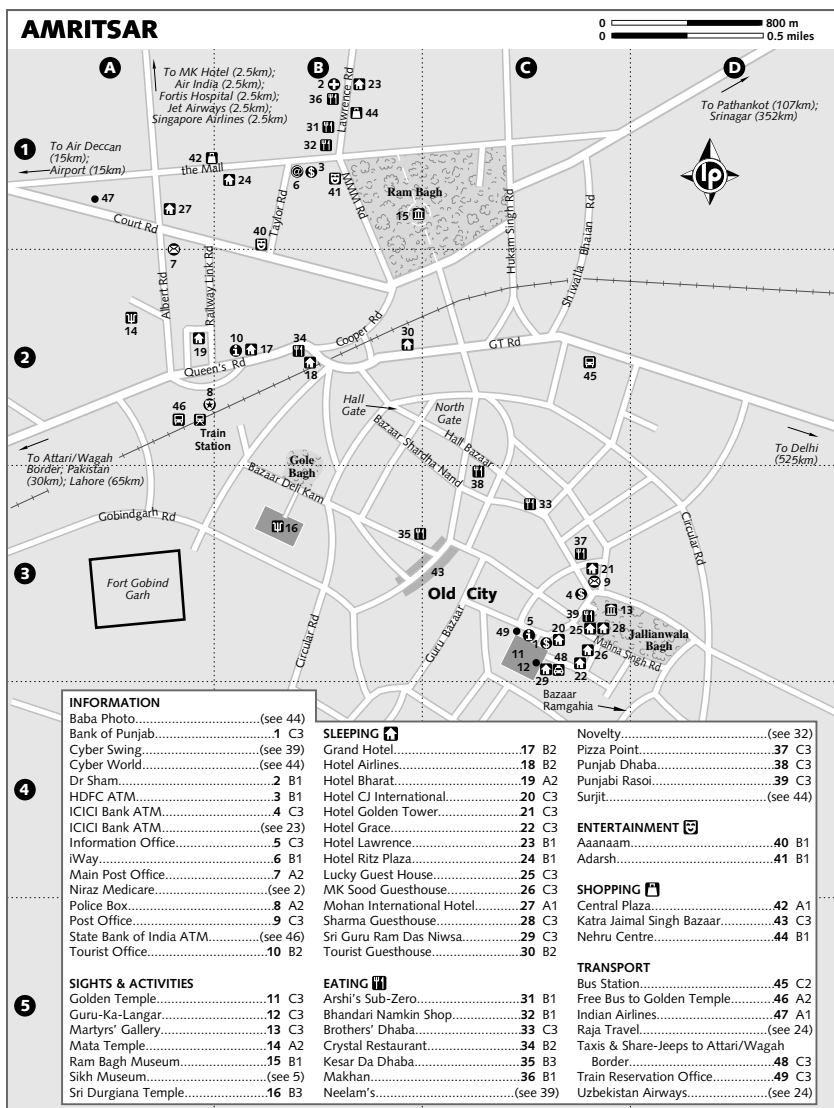
Cyber World (Nehru Centre; per hr Rs 20; ☎ 8.30am-11pm)

iWay (Mall Rd; per hr Rs 30; ☎ 7am-midnight Mon-Sat, to 11pm Sun)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Dr Sham (☎ 2224928; Lawrence Rd; ☎ 11am-2pm & 5.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-10.30pm Sun)

Fortis Hospital (☎ 5050222; Ranjit Ave; consultation fee Rs 100-200) Next to MK Hotel, this modern private 24-hour emergency hospital has a 24-hour pharmacy.



Niraz Medicare (☎ 2566787; Lawrence Rd; 🕒 8am-midnight, free home delivery 11am-8pm) Pharmacy.

MONEY

Bank of Punjab (☎ 2554891; Golden Temple; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Exchanges travellers cheques in 10 currencies and cash in all major and some minor currencies.

ICICI ATM (Lawrence Rd) Also has an ATM in the old city.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Baba Photo (☎ 5052714; 12 Nehru Centre; 🕒 10am-10pm Mon-Sat) Sells memory cards (512MB Rs 1800).

POST

Main post office (☎ 2566032; Court Rd; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Post office (Phawara Chowk; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 2402452; Queen's Rd; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Hidden away down an alley.

Sights & Activities

GOLDEN TEMPLE

True to Sikhism's inclusive nature, all are welcome at the Sikhs' holiest shrine. The atmosphere inside is genuinely spiritual but not at all po-faced or daunting, with crowds chatting and bathing in the pool.

Pilgrims and visitors to the complex must remove shoes, wash their feet and cover their heads; head scarves are provided. Photography is only permitted from the **Parkarma**, the marble walkway surrounding the pool. Tobacco and alcohol are not allowed inside the temple. There is an **information office** (☹ 7am-8pm) near the main entrance.

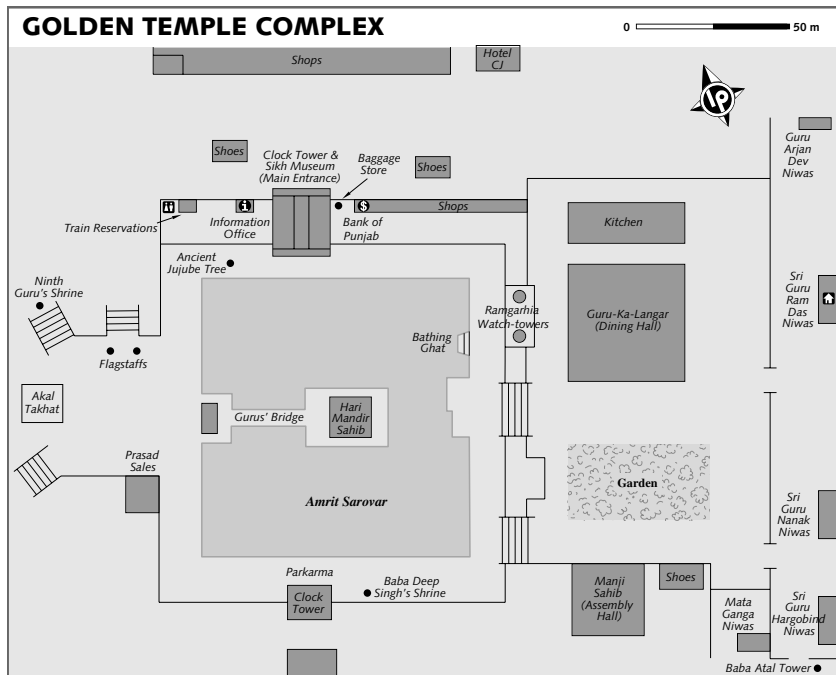
The architecture, like the religion, is a blend of Hindu and Islamic styles but very different to both. The golden dome (said to be gilded with 750kg of pure gold) represents an inverted lotus flower, a symbol of Sikh devotees' aim to live a pure life. Like the Taj Mahal, it's worth seeing at different times of day.

A causeway (Gurus' Bridge) leads to the two-storey marble temple, **Hari Mandir Sahib** (or Darbar Sahib). This stands in the middle of the sacred pool **Amrit Sarovar** (Pool of Nectar), which gave the town its name. The lower parts of the marble walls are decorated with inlaid flower and animal motifs in the *pietra dura* (marble inlay) style of the Taj Mahal.

Four priests inside the temple keep up a continuous chant in Gurmukhi from the Sikh holy book and this is broadcast around the temple complex by loudspeakers. The original copy of the Sikh holy book, the **Guru Granth Sahib**, is kept under a pink shroud in the Hari Mandir Sahib during the day and returns ceremoniously to the Akal Takhat at night. Ceremony times are 5am and 9.15pm in winter, and 4.30am and 10.15pm in summer.

Upstairs, in the main entrance clock tower, the **Sikh Museum** (☹ 7am-7pm) tells the grisly history of the Sikhs, martyred by the Mughals, the British and Mrs Gandhi.

The **Akal Takhat**, where the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), or Sikh Parliament, traditionally meets, was heavily



damaged by the army in 1984, but has been carefully restored.

Completed in 1784, the octagonal **Baba Atal Tower** commemorates Atal Rai, the son of sixth guru Har Gobind. After Atal performed a miracle, bringing back to life a playmate who had died of a snake bite, his father scolded him for interfering with the ways of god. The repentant youngster committed suicide on this spot in return for the life he had saved. The gurdwara's nine stories each represent one year of Atal's short life.

Guru-Ka-Langar is the free (donations appreciated) community dining room, a feature of all Sikh temples as a mark of unity among people of all religions, creeds and nationalities. The huge kitchens (one has a chapati machine) prepare dhal, rice and chapatis for up to 40,000 pilgrims a day. All are welcome to join the masses eating on the floor.

JALLIANWALA BAGH

This small **park** (☎ 6am-7pm summer, 7am-6pm winter) commemorates 2000 Indians killed or wounded here by the British authorities in 1919 – see the boxed text, below. Some of the bullet marks are still visible, as is the well into which hundreds leapt to avoid the bullets. The park also contains the **Martyrs' Gallery** (☎ 9am-5pm summer, 10am-4pm winter).

RAM BAGH

This park has a must-see **museum** (admission Rs 10; ☎ 10am-4.45pm Tue-Sun, closed holidays) in the summer palace built by the Lion of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839). Under the great one-eyed leader, Punjab colonised much of present-day Kashmir and Pakistan.

The weapons, paintings and manuscripts on display bring the man and this golden age of Punjabi history to life.

MATA TEMPLE

This labyrinthine Hindu **cave temple** (☎ dawn-dusk) commemorates the bespectacled 20th-century female saint, Lal Devi. Women wishing to become pregnant come here to pray. The circuitous route to the main shrine passes through ankle-deep waterways, low tunnels, staircases, walkways and caves, the last of which turns out to be the inside of a divine mouth.

SRI DURGIANA TEMPLE

Dedicated to the goddess Durga, this 16th-century **temple** (☎ dawn-dusk) is a Hindu version of the Golden Temple, sometimes known as the Silver Temple for its carved silver doors.

Sleeping

There are plenty of modern hotels in the old city, but the upmarket hotels are found to the north, where many people prefer to stay to escape the hectic old city.

BUDGET

Golden Temple (dm free, r Rs 50-200) To stay in the huge accommodation blocks for pilgrims and visitors, check in at Guru Arjan Dev Niwas. Foreigners are generally put up in Sri Guru Ram Das Niwas next door. Rooms and dorms are basic, with shared bathrooms, no hot water and a three-day-stay limit, but this is more of an experience than a hotel. No-one will ask for a donation, but they are appreciated.

Tourist Guesthouse (☎ 2559355; tourist_guest_amritsar@yahoo.com; 1355 GT Rd; dm/s/d Rs 150/150-

CARNAGE AT JALLIANWALA BAGH

Unrest in Amritsar was sparked by the Rowlatt Act (1919), which gave British authorities emergency powers to imprison without trial Indians suspected of sedition. Hartals (one-day strikes) were organised in protest, and escalated into rioting and looting. Three British bank managers were murdered in reprisal attacks following the killing of Indian protestors by the British.

General Dyer was called upon to return order to the city. On 13 April 1919 (Baisakhi day), 20,000 Indians were holding a peaceful demonstration in Jallianwala Bagh, an open space surrounded by high walls. Dyer arrived with 150 troops and without warning ordered his soldiers to open fire. Six minutes later, more than 400 people were dead, and a further 1500 were wounded.

Dyer's action was supported by some of his British colleagues but described as 'a savage and inappropriate folly' by Sir Edwin Montague, the Secretary of State for India. It galvanised Indian nationalism – Gandhi responded with his programme of civil disobedience, announcing that 'cooperation in any shape or form with this satanic government is sinful'. Richard Attenborough's excellent film *Gandhi* dramatically re-enacts the massacre and inquiry.

THE FIRST GURU

Born in present-day Pakistan, Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the founder of Sikhism, was unimpressed with both Muslim and Hindu religious practices. Unlike many Indian holy men, he believed in family life and the value of hard work – he married, had two sons and worked as a farmer when not travelling around, preaching and singing self-composed *kirtan* (Sikh hymns) with his Muslim musician, Mardana. He performed miracles and stressed meditation on God's name as the best way to enlightenment.

Nanak believed in equality centuries before it became fashionable and campaigned against the caste system. He was a practical guru – 'a person who makes an honest living and shares earnings with others recognises the way to God'. He appointed his most talented disciple to be his successor, not one of his sons.

His *kirtan* are still sung every day in every gurdwara (Sikh temple), and his picture hangs in millions of homes, from humble farm cottages to the prime minister's residence. For more on Sikhism see p67.

200/200-300; 📍) Discounts are readily offered at this basic hotel, a popular backpacker choice for decades. More expensive rooms have TVs, hot showers and private bathrooms.

Sharma Guesthouse (☎ 2551757; Mahna Singh Rd; r Rs 200-600; 📍) If you don't mind roughing it, this aged old-city institution is a superb place to stay, with a cheap restaurant that's a lively local hang-out and produces a good chicken tikka marsala.

Lucky Guest House (☎ 2542175; s/d 350/400, with AC Rs 600/750) The lilac rooms with TVs and hot showers are less of a selling point than the hotel's location near the Golden Temple, which can be seen from the rooftop garden.

MK Sood Guesthouse (☎ 5093376; s with/without AC Rs 850/550; 📍) This modern, clean hotel near the Golden Temple has rooms with big beds, tiny balconies and all facilities.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel Grace (☎ 2559355; d Rs 550-850, with AC Rs 1250; 📍) Another modern hotel with bright and clean rooms that is just a stone's throw from the Golden Temple.

Hotel Golden Tower (☎ 2534446; www.hotelgolden tower.com; Phawara Chowk; s Rs 450-1100, d 550-1450; 📍) Another hotel with location at the top of its list of charms, this slightly beige, no-frills mid-range option has sparsely decorated rooms with fridges, a lift and helpful staff.

Hotel Airlines (☎ 2564848; hotel-airlines@vsnl.com; Cooper Rd; r Rs 750-1200; 📍) The name is the only generic thing about this friendly hotel with a pleasant terrace garden. Seven of the deluxe rooms have a swing seat and all have hot water.

ourpick Grand Hotel (☎ 2562424; grand@jla.vsnl.net.in; Queen's Rd; s/d Rs 1000/1200; 📍 📍) In this

smart place near the train station, cheerful rooms with fridges border a jungly garden. The bar is the best in town, with draft beer, Klimt-inspired murals and Hollywood movie posters.

Hotel CJ International (☎ 25443478; www.cjhotel.net; r Rs 1100-1850, ste Rs 2500; 📍 📍) There are views of the Golden Temple from the roof and from five of the 25 neat rooms in this bright, modern hotel, one of the old city's best. The colourful, diner-style restaurant (meals Rs 65 to Rs 80) serves fast food as well as Chinese and curries.

Hotel Lawrence (☎ 2400105; www.lawrenceamritsar.com; Lawrence Rd; s/d/ste Rs 1800/2200/3200; 📍) Calm, comfortable retreat from Lawrence Rd, with a lift leading from the 1st-floor reception and restaurant to spotless, great-value rooms.

MK Hotel (☎ 2504610; www.mkhotel.com; Ranjit Ave; s/d Rs 2200/3400; 📍 📍 📍) Poky bathrooms and a location 4km from the city centre are the only shortfalls at Amritsar's top hotel. Beyond the elegant foyer are a thick-carpeted restaurant (meals Rs 250 to Rs 350), a 24-hour café, a cosy bar with leather armchairs, a health club, and business-style rooms.

Mohan International Hotel (☎ 2227801; hotel@jla.vsnl.net.in; Albert Rd; s/d Rs 2200/3200, ste Rs 3000-4200; 📍 📍) This has some of the best rooms in Amritsar – the classy furnishings even extend as far as the odd Greek sculpture (check out room 101). Prices include breakfast and there's a *ghazal* (Urdu songs derived from poetry) performance in the restaurant (meals Rs 250) every night apart from Tuesday.

Hotel Ritz Plaza (☎ 2562836; hrp@sarovarhotels.com; 45 the Mall; s/d/ste Rs 3000/4000/4800; 📍 📍) What this business-style hotel lacks in character

it makes up for in comfort, with minibars and marble-floored bathrooms in the rooms. There's a bar with relaxing armchairs and nonguests can use the pool for Rs 120.

Eating

A culinary centre, Amritsar is famous for its method of deep-frying fish with lemon, chilli, garlic and ginger.

RESTAURANTS

Punjabi Rasoi (meals Rs 40-70) This clean vegetarian restaurant with black-and-white décor and mirrors serves North and South Indian food.

Pizza Point (Fawla Chowk; pizzas Rs 65-80) This is a relaxed old-city retreat with smoked windows, serving tasty pizzas, grilled sandwiches and other fast food.

Crystal Restaurant (☎ 2225555; Cooper Rd; takeaway Rs 25-80, meals Rs 90-170; 🕒 11am-11.30pm) Global favourites from coronary to stroganoff are served among mirrors and imitation impressionist paintings at Amritsar's classiest restaurant.

Surjit (4 Nehru Centre; meals Rs 150-200) Famous tandoori chicken emporium serving hearty Punjabi curries.

QUICK EATS

Bhandari Namkin Shop (Lawrence Rd; namkin per 1kg Rs 100) Situated next to Novelty, this is the place for a head-spinning variety of *namkin*.

Arshi's Sub-Zero (Lawrence Rd; scoop Rs 12) Sodas, sundaes, shakes and veggie burgers are on the boards in this rainbow-coloured parlour, only darkened by the gloomy proprietor. You can try before you buy the ice cream – Raj Bhoj is dried fruit and Blind Love is vanilla choc chip.

our pick! Makhan (Lawrence Rd; chicken Rs 150, fish 300g Rs 60; 🕒 2-11pm) A great place for deep-fried fish or chicken, which you'll see sizzling in a huge wok outside from 5pm onwards.

Novelty (Lawrence Rd; snacks & meals Rs 30-70) The exquisite sweets and gateaux served at the outside are counter are perennial favourites, while the adjoining Kwality restaurant offers dishes from across the subcontinent, China and the West.

Amritsar is famous for its *dhabas* (snack bars) such as **Punjab Dhaba** (Goal Hatti Chowk; meals Rs 80), **Kesar Da Dhaba** (Passian Chowk; meals Rs 46-66) and **Brothers' Dhaba** (Town Hall Chowk; meals Rs 65-75).

Entertainment

Cinemas **Aanaam** (Taylor Rd) and **Adarsh** (MMM Rd) both screen Hindi films a few times a day.

Shopping

As you wander through the narrow alleys of the old city lined with crumbling *havelis* (traditional, ornately decorated residences) and other heritage buildings you'll see stalls selling everything from roasted sweet potatoes to jootis (Rs 150 per pair).

Katra Jaimal Singh Bazaar is full of textiles and saris. More modern shops are in the Nehru Centre, Central Plaza and malls in the north of the city.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Amritsar is becoming a hub for international flights. **Raja Travel** (☎ 2565150; travel@rajaamritsar.com; Hotel Ritz Plaza; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) can book flights.

Air Deccan (080-39008888; airport) Budget flights to Delhi daily at 9.15am.

Air India (☎ 2508122; MK Hotel, Ranjit Ave; 🕒 9.30am-5pm) Flies to Delhi (US\$100) most days at 1.50am, and on Wednesday at 3.10am.

Indian Airlines (☎ 2213392; fax 2213394; 39A Court Rd; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Flies to Delhi (US\$135) on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday at 3.40am.

Jet Airways (☎ 9814054417; MK Hotel; 🕒 10am-7pm) Flies to Delhi (US\$140) daily at 2.15pm, and directly to London.

Singapore Airlines (☎ 2500330; fax 2501001; Nagpal Tower-II, Ranjit Ave) Flies to numerous international destinations via Singapore.

Uzbekistan Airways (☎ 2566819; fax 2566820; Hotel Ritz Plaza) Flies to Europe, New York and Moscow.

BUS

Frequent buses leave for Delhi (Rs 200, 10 hours), Chandigarh (Rs 110, seven hours), Pathankot (Rs 50, three hours), Jammu (Rs 110, six hours) and Attari on the India-Pakistan border (Rs 15, 1½ hours).

One or two buses go daily to Dalhousie (Rs 125, six hours), Dharamsala (Rs 115, six hours), Shimla (Rs 200, 10 hours) and Manali (Rs 270, 14 hours) in Himachal Pradesh, and Dehra Dun (Rs 200, 11 hours) in Uttarakhnad.

Private buses for Delhi (with/without AC Rs 280/450, 8½ hours) leave from near the train station at 10pm. Other private buses go to Chandigarh (Rs 150 to 200), Jammu (Rs 140) and Katra (Rs 160) from Gandhi Gate.

CROSSING INTO PAKISTAN

Border Hours

The border is open from 10am to 4pm daily, but get there at least half an hour before it closes.

Foreign Exchange

There is a **State Bank of India** (☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat) which exchanges currency, but it's a tiny branch so change money in Amritsar if possible.

Onward Transport

From Wagah (Pakistan), buses (Rs 20, one hour, every 30 minutes) run to the train station in Lahore, 30km away, while a taxi costs around Rs 400.

Visas

Visas are theoretically available in Delhi however travellers are strongly urged apply for Pakistani visas in their home country. The Pakistan embassy in Delhi is issuing very few visas, given the tension between the two countries (see also p1168).

TRAIN

Apart from the train station, a less busy **train reservation office** (☎ 8am–8pm, to 2pm Sun) is at the Golden Temple.

Direct express trains travel to Delhi (2nd/ chair car Rs 132/595, eight hours); but the fastest is the twice-daily *Shatabdi Express* (5.10am service chair car/1AC Rs 445/585, 5pm service Rs 500/670, 5¼ hours). A daily *Amritsar–Howrah Mail* run links Amritsar with Lucknow (sleeper/3AC/2AC Rs 460/1142/1499, 16½ hours), Varanasi (Rs 519/1309/1739, 22 hours) and Howrah (Rs 636/1646/2227, 37 hours).

Getting Around

A free bus service runs from the train station and the bus stand to the Golden Temple every 45 minutes from 4.30am to 9.30pm. Otherwise, from the train station to the Golden Temple a cycle-rickshaw costs Rs 20, an autorickshaw Rs 35 and a taxi Rs 50. Hiring an autorickshaw to tour the city costs Rs 50 per hour. To the airport, 15km away, an autorickshaw costs Rs 100 and a taxi Rs 200.

INDIA–PAKISTAN BORDER AT ATTARI/WAGAH

People come to the border, 30km west of Amritsar, for two reasons: to enjoy the late afternoon border-closing ceremony (see the boxed text, p276) or to use the only crossing between India and Pakistan (see the boxed text, above).

Buses travel from Amritsar to Attari village (Rs 15, 1¼ hours), and then an autorickshaw will take you from there to the border for Rs 15. Taxis from Amritsar to the border (one way or return) cost Rs 450 and take an hour, while autorickshaws charge Rs 200. Shared jeeps also run to the border-closing ceremony from the dining-hall entrance to the Golden Temple. They leave about two hours before the ceremony starts and return afterwards.

PATHANKOT

☎ 0186 / pop 168,000

Pathankot, in northwest Punjab, is a transport hub. The **bus station** (☎ 2220088; Gurdaspur Rd) is 500m from the Pathankot Junction train station and 3km from Chakki Bank train station.

Two kilometres from Pathankot Junction is Punjab Tourism's **Gulmohar Tourist Complex** (☎ 20292; r Rs 300–600; 🚽). The station retiring rooms are also reasonable, and there are hotels on Railway Rd.

Buses and taxis run to Amritsar, Jammu, Chamba, Dalhousie, Dharamsala, Manali, Chandigarh and Delhi.

Several daily express trains leave for Delhi (sleeper/3AC/2AC Rs 388/940/1206, 11 hours), while other daily expresses serve Amritsar (sleeper Rs 271, three hours) and Jammu (sleeper Rs 271, three hours). The Kangra Valley narrow-gauge line leaves from Pathankot Junction train station.

BORDER BRAVADO

Every late afternoon, just before sunset, the Indian and Pakistani military meet at the border to engage in an extraordinary 20-minute ceremony of pure theatre. The border-closing ceremony elicits machismo and posturing from the proud young soldiers on both sides, but also, despite the two countries' uneasy relationship, a stunning display of harmony. It starts around 4.30pm in winter and 5.30pm in summer.

It's worth getting there early – though avoid the stampede when the crowd charges along the chicken run leading to the grandstands. Foreigners are allowed to sit at the front in the VIP area anyway – or, better, grab a seat at the roadside near the gates, right in view of the high-kicking action.

At this point the young soldiers are milling about with the air of self-conscious debutantes, and the real action is in the people who run at the border gates carrying a huge Indian flag. A compere stokes the crowd's patriotic fervour, as they cry 'Hindustan Zindabad' (long live Hindustan). The Pakistanis are equally vociferous, except during Ramadan, when the stands are noticeably quieter, and are segregated by sex.

With a bellow from the guardroom, a squad stomps out onto the road, shoulders square, moustaches twirled and eyes bulging. The drill is to parade up and down in front of your home audience, stamp your feet, throw in some yells and, once puffed up, march to face the other side with a scowling face and clenched fists. Preceded by a kick so high the soldier looks in danger of concussing himself, the high-octane march to the border is vaguely reminiscent of Monty Python's Ministry of Silly Walks sketch.

The gates are flung open. The commanding officers march up to each other and perform a brief handshake and salute. Then the guard parties goose-step to the border and wheel to face their flags; the Indian and Pakistani soldiers stand shoulder to shoulder, their black-and-red and green, red and gold uniforms only centimetres apart.

Bugles blow and the flags are lowered slowly, diplomatically remaining at the same level. The flags are quickly folded and marched back to their respective guardrooms. The border – separating western Punjab from an area that, until 1947, was also part of the state (see p50) – is closed for the night.

ANANDPUR SAHIB

☎ 01881 / pop 14,700

The Sikhs' holiest site after the Golden Temple has several historical gurdwaras, backed by the Nana Devi Hills. A pilgrimage site for more than 300 years, it was founded by ninth guru Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1664, before the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb beheaded him for refusing to convert to Islam. His son, Guru Gobind Singh, founded Sikh brotherhood the Khalsa (see p67) here in 1699, and **Holla Mohalla** (see the boxed text, p260) celebrates the anniversary every March.

There is a State Bank of India ATM at the side of Kesgarh Sahib.

The fortresslike **Kesgarh Sahib** is the largest gurdwara and has a number of holy weapons on display, some of them in the hands of the guards. The smaller gurdwara Sis Ganj marks the spot where Guru Tegh Bahadur's head was cremated after it was brought back from Delhi. Some 500m from town is **Anandpur Sahib**, where a flight of steps leads to a

maroon fort on the roof. From here you can see the five-petal form (inspired by the five warrior-saints in the Khalsa) of the Khalsa Heritage Complex, where a small **interpretation centre** (admission free; ☎ 8am-8pm) explains Sikhism.

Kishan Haveli (☎ 01887-232650; Academy Rd; r Rs 300-1000; 📶), located 1.5km from town, is a tumbledown palace with surprisingly plush rooms with balconies providing a break from the religious intensity. The only disappointment is the restaurant (meals Rs 50).

Gurdwaras also provide accommodation (doubles with fan are available, cost by donation) and free meals, though they can be full.

The bus and train stations are 300m apart on the main road outside town. Buses leave frequently for Chandigarh (Rs 45, two hours) and every hour to Amritsar (Rs 92, five hours).

The overnight *Delhi–Una Himachal Express* connects Anandpur Sahib with Delhi (sleeper/3AC/2AC Rs 271/546/641, eight hours).

HARYANA

Haryana's name means either 'Abode of God' or 'green home' depending on whether you believe its first syllable refers to Hari, one of Vishnu's aliases (see p64), or *hara*, Hindi for green. Either description will ring true to escapees from Delhi or Chandigarh who cross Haryana's flat, patchwork landscape and visit the revered Kurukshetra.

The Haryana state government has built a chain of modern hotel-restaurants along the main roads that are named after the many birds found in the state. **Haryana Tourism** (Chandigarh ☎ 2702955; Sector 17; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri); Delhi (☎ 011-23324910; haryanatourism74@hotmail.com; Chand-erlok Bldg, 36 Janpath; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) can supply a pamphlet.

KURUKSHETRA

☎ 01744 / pop 154,000

Kurukshetra may look like an unprepossessing regional centre, but it is in fact the birthplace of the universe and the spot where good triumphed over evil – at least according to Hindu teachings. Brahma created man and the universe here, and Krishna delivered his epic Bhagavad Gita sermon, offered as advice to Arjuna (p66) before he fought the 18-day Mahabharata battle in which good came out on top.

The town takes its name from founder Kuru, the Aryan king who offered his limbs to Vishnu in order to establish a land of ethics and values.

There's a lacklustre **tourist office** (☎ 291615; Pehowa Rd; ☎ 10am-6pm) in Neelkanthi Krishana Dham Yatri Niwas, a hotel run by Haryana Tourism opposite Hotel Harsh.

At the **Sri Krishna Museum** (☎ 091288; admission Rs 15; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, closed holidays), Krishna kills the Crane demon, subdues the serpent Kaliya, plays the flute and wanders among cows. The fascinating museum is packed with ancient and modern representations of this heroic incarnation of Vishnu (see p64), created by artists from across the subcontinent using materials including wood, stone, bronze, ivory, palm leaves and silk.

Next door is the **Kurukshetra Panorama & Science Centre** (☎ 291100; admission Rs 15; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Tue-Sun). An air-brushed sky flares behind vultures picking at severed heads in the diorama telling the story of the Mahabharata

battle between the good Pandavas and the evil Kauravas. The ground floor has fun, interactive science exhibits.

Just 500m away is India's largest tank, the **Bhramasarovar**, which was created by Brahma according to the Vamana Purana (see p65). Surrounded by bathing ghats and walkways, the popular spot attracts huge crowds during solar eclipses and **Gita Jayanti**, anniversary of the Bhagavad Gita (see the boxed text, p260).

Another 6km away is Jyotisar, where the **banyan tree** is said to be an offshoot of the one under which Krishna delivered the Bhagavad Gita.

An entertaining way to see the tree and the nearby temple and tank is at the one-hour **sound-&light show** (admission Rs 15; ☎ 7.30pm Tue-Sun), with its booming Hindi narration of the momentous local events.

More interesting, **Shaikh Chehli's tomb** (Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100; ☎ dawn-dusk Sat-Thu) is located 2.3km from the Sri Krishna Museum. This Sufi saint and spiritual teacher of the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh is buried with his family in sandstone-and-marble mausoleums atop a red-brick fortress, surrounded by 12 cupolas. It has views across Kurukshetra and of the neighbouring madrasa (Islamic seminary) and Mughal garden, which respectively contain a small **archaeological museum** (admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Sat-Thu) and the ruins of a caravanserai.

Don't be put off by the name or the unappealing façade, **Hotel Harsh** (☎ 396192; Pehowa Rd; r 450-650; ☎) is a friendly hotel near Birla Mandir Chowk and is the best place to stay and eat in central Kurukshetra. The five comfortable rooms have TVs and sit-down flush toilets, and the popular restaurant serves a respectable curry.

Some 6km west of the Grand Trunk Rd, Kurukshetra is reached by regular buses (Rs 90, three hours) from Delhi ISBT and trains (2nd class/chair car Rs 70/400, 2½ hours).

For Patiala in Punjab, buses regularly run to Pehowa (Rs 16, 45 minutes) and from there to Patiala (Rs 27, 1½ hours).

SOUTH & WEST OF DELHI Surajkund

Some 30km south of Delhi, this town at the northern end of the Aravalli Range is the site of the awesome **Surajkund Crafts Mela** (see the boxed text, p260).

Surajkund is named after the impressive 10th-century **sun pool** built by Raja Surajpal, leader of the sun-worshipping Tomars.

Haryana Tourism has three hotels here, king of which is the luxurious **Hotel Rajhans** (☎ 0129-2512843; r Rs 1500-2300, ste Rs 2800-9900; 🏠), with its health club, swimming pools, putting greens and views of the sun pool.

The midrange options are **Hermitage** (☎ 0129-25112314; r Rs 900-1300, hut Rs 1600; 🏠) and, better, **Sunbird** (☎ 0129-2511357; hut Rs 900-1100, r Rs 1250, ste Rs 2000-3000; 🏠), which has lake views.

To get to Surajkund, take a bus from Delhi ISBT (Rs 20, two hours) or catch the Agra train to Faridabad (2nd class/chair car Rs 35/317, 30 minutes), 7km south, and continue by autorickshaw.

During the Mela, special buses run from Delhi ISBT.

Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary

This 145-hectare **sanctuary** (Indian/foreigner Rs 5/40; camera/video Rs 25/500; 🕒 6.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar) plays host to 255 bird species, including Saras cranes, golden orioles, red munias, green barbets and black drongos. Its fluctuating population of woodland, shallow-water and

deep-water birds includes 157 resident species and 98 visiting species from Western Europe, the Middle East and polar regions. The best time to visit is October to March, when, even at noon, stalks and herons can be seen from the 3.5km track circling the lake.

Haryana Tourism's **Rosy Pelican Complex** (☎ 0124-2375242; r Rs 800-1300; 🏠) is less notable for its rooms and so-called huts, which are a little decrepit at the bottom of the spectrum, than for its relaxing bar-restaurant.

It's worth staying the night at Sultanpur, 46km southwest of Delhi, because getting there is harder than spotting a red-crested pochard. Crowded local buses run through the city centre to Dula Khan (Rs 10, one hour). Change in the lay-by there for Gurgaon (Rs 10, one hour), then cover the remaining 14km in a Tempo (Rs 20) or autorickshaw – though the drivers demand Rs 400.

Alternatively, catch a passenger train to Garhi Harsaru and walk the remaining 5km or take a rickshaw (Rs 50). The easiest option is to charter a taxi from the city centre (Rs 1000) or, if you're arriving by plane, straight from the airport, which is only 25km away but no cheaper in a prepaid taxi.